Governing Council Structure and Performance of Federal Universities in Nigeria

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Abstract

This study investigated the relationship between governing council structure and performance of federal universities in Nigeria. To achieve this purpose, a review of the extant literature was made, questions were raised and hypotheses were formulated and tested. The population of the study consists of the sixty-three (63) federal universities in Nigeria. For lack of available data, thirty-seven (37) federal universities were purposively selected for the study. The data for the various dimensions of the independent variable (governing council structure) were obtained through a questionnaire administered to council officers of the respective universities while data on the university's performance with eighteen (18) performance indicators were sourced from Times Higher Education, World University Ranking (2024). The data generated for this study were analysed descriptively using simple mean and standard deviation while the stated hypotheses were tested with the Ordinary Least Square (OLS) multiple regression analysis. Findings of the study revealed that council size and council meetings have a negative and non-significant relationship with performance of Federal Universities in Nigeria; Council expertise has a negative and significant effect on performance of federal universities in Nigeria; tenure of council members, and council gender diversity have a positive and significant relationship with performance of federal universities in Nigeria. However, a council with ethnic diversity has a negative relationship with performance of Federal Universities in Nigeria. Finally, it was observed that political party affiliations significantly moderate the relationship between governing council structure and performance of federal universities in Nigeria. The study recommends among others, that the large size of governing councils in federal universities in Nigeria should be discouraged since it hinders improved performance of the university.

Keywords: *Governing council structure, performance, federal universities*

Introduction

A university is an institution where students pursue and acquire intellectual, technological, character, moral and practical skills. The Federal Republic of Nigeria (2014) in its National Policy on Education, states that the main objective of a university is to provide high-quality, comprehensive educational and training opportunities that are compatible to changing needs of society. In achieving this goal, resources (human, financial and material) are made available to the university by the proprietor, and a body known as the governing council (board) is constituted to exercise oversight function on the university management in the utilization of these resources. Governing Councils, which go by different nomenclatures such as Governing Boards, Board of Governors, Board of Directors, and Board of Trustees, are specifically responsible for the institution's policies, strategic direction, and oversight of performance, compliance and regulation. It is therefore imperative to assess the performance of the university

in meeting its set goal. According to Martho (2024), performance is the level of success recorded by an organization. It is the ability to achieve a predetermined objective.

In the context of a university, performance is the level of success recorded in teaching, research, and community service by the university. Briggs (2013) posits that in their set-up, universities are meant to be highly democratic institutions and the committee system, which serves as the basis of decision making, exists from the level of the Council, down to the level of the departments in the faculties. The system allows issues to be freely debated and democratically decided upon at scheduled meetings even if such decisions are subject to ratification by higher authorities like the Senate on academic matters, and the Council in some other respects. However, the affiliation of members of council to a particular political party may strongly affect their attitudes and behaviours thereby compromising decision-making. Alan (2008) reported that researchers from Yale University conducted an experiment examining the effects of political party identification in governing council. The results imply that group associations and political party affiliation influence individuals' behaviours and attitudes in the governing council.

It has been observed that activities and roles of the governing councils seem to have been poorly performed by the respective governing council members across Nigeria. This has manifested in the poor development of tertiary institutions in Nigeria. According to Ogunode and Sarkinfada (2023), the development of tertiary institutions to an extent, may likely be connected to the leadership quality of the various people appointed and selected to provide leadership in the institutions. Given the above, interest in the assessment of the performance of universities, which is stimulated by the desire for good governance practices of universities has become a burning issue in academic discourse in recent times. This move has been endorsed by the Federal and State Auditors-General who are responsible for auditing universities (Storey & Armstrong, 2004).

Studies demonstrate that governance structures influence the performance and management of an organization (Magalhães et al., 2013). According to Gao and Li (2020), good governance influences the outcomes of systems in higher education institutions and their performance. Therefore, institutions intending to support effective management should consider the association between governance and performance. Additionally, a study by Holliman, Sheriston, Martin, Collie and Sayer (2018) shows that good governance affects performance by improving the financial and human resources of the institution and the expected performance. Good governance also helps institutions to realize academic quality by encouraging them to strive to attain academic service performance (Schmidt, Chau, Dagdagan, Fuhrmann, Lam, Niedermeier & Köhle, 2020). Performance in domains such as research and education increase the autonomy of institutions. Researchers and policy makers alike opined that the governing council structure, which comprises council composition, tenure, meetings, and diversity in gender, ethnicity, qualifications, age among others influence the performance of universities.

Prior studies such as Mikkonen, Andrade, Pekkola, Antonowicz, Carvalho and Geshwind (2025), Doki, Idoko and Kaji (2024), Ogunode and Sarkinfada (2023), Ofor and Ikediugwu (2023), Akura and Okwori (2022), Tsav (2015), and Williams (2011) relate governing councils to higher education performance. But there are mixed findings. While some conclude that the governing council positively affects the performance of any higher education system, others conclude otherwise. More so, most of the studies that linked the governing council to tertiary institutions' performance are of foreign origin. Environmental differences could cause differences in research findings. The few available studies in Nigeria focused on the entire University system without any particular reference to Federal Universities. An attempt to close

these existing gaps necessitated this present study, which is aimed at investigating the relationship between governing council structure and performance of Universities in Nigeria.

Considering the above objective, the following null hypotheses were formulated and answered:

Ho_1:   Governing council structure has no significant relationship with the performance of federal universities in Nigeria.

Ho_2:   Council size has no significant relationship with the performance of federal universities in Nigeria.

Ho_3:   Council expertise has no significant relationship with the performance of federal universities in Nigeria.

Ho_4:   Council diligence has no significant relationship with the performance of federal universities in Nigeria.

Ho_5:   Council tenure has no significant relationship with the performance of federal universities in Nigeria.

Ho_6:   Council gender diversity has no significant relationship with the performance of federal universities in Nigeria.

Ho_7:   Council national diversity has no significant relationship with the performance of federal universities in Nigeria.

Ho_8:   Political party affiliation has no significant effect in moderating the relationship between governing council structure and performance of federal universities in Nigeria.

Conceptual Framework

Universities are complex organisations but the way to govern them is clearly stated in their respective enabling laws. The University Governing Council is charged with the responsibility of the general superintendence, the overall control of finances and properties, the appointment, promotion, welfare and discipline of staff. It is a body corporate with perpetual succession and a common seal and may sue and be sued in its corporate name. It is regarded as the most crucial organ of the tertiary institutions because of its position in making the final decision in areas of governance in the institutions. The major functions of governing councils include setting policies, defining directions, reviewing, approving and monitoring the university budget and evaluating its performance as well as assessing the overall impact of its implementation (Martho, 2004).

Governing Council Structure

Governing council structure refers to the components of the governing council in terms of several members, experience and qualifications of members, proportion of women to men membership, frequency of meetings, membership tenure, and ethnic diversity.

Council Size

This refers to the number of members in a governing council. Smith (2024) posits that governing councils of universities are of varying sizes across the United States. Smaller boards may have about ten members, while larger boards can have over 50 members. He further stated that in 2016 in the United States of America, the average public university board had 12 members, while the average private university board had 29 members. Some university governing councils are composed entirely of alumni of that university. Other councils contain various elected officials, often the visitor, as ex officio members. Members of the university governing council can be selected in a variety of ways. Members of public university councils are most often selected by the proprietor (visitor). Four States in the United States of America

(Colorado, Michigan, Nebraska, and Nevada) elect members of some university councils by popular vote while councils of private universities can be selected either by an alumni vote or by the existing members of the board (Martho, 2024).

The composition of the governing council of federal universities in Nigeria is provided for in the Universities (Miscellaneous Provisions) (Amendment) Act, 2003. Under the Act, the Governing Council of Federal Universities consists of: the Pro- Chancellor; the Vice Chancellor; the Deputy Vice Chancellor (s); one person from the Federal Ministry of Education; four persons representing a variety of interest and broadly representatives of the whole federation to be appointed by the National Council of Ministers; four persons appointed by the Senate from among its members; two persons appointed by the Congregation from among its members; and one person appointed by Convocation from among its members.

There is, however, a lack of consensus among researchers regarding the optimum board size that ensures the best performance. Lipton and Lorsch (1999) recommend size of eight or nine members while Garcia, et al. (2007) recommends size of fifteen members. A minimum of twelve (12) members constitutes the governing council of federal universities in Nigeria.

Council Gender Diversity

Council gender diversity refers to the proportion of women to men as members of the governing council. Adams (2016) opined that diversity creates harmony, good communication and board cohesiveness. Achieving gender equality in decision-making bodies has long been a widely recognized political and institutional goal within higher education institutions (HEIs) (Klenk et al.2022). The desire for gender balance is often supported by arguments emphasizing the positive impacts of gender diversity and the increased involvement of women in fostering organizational growth and development. Research has consistently highlighted the benefits of diversified and equitable decision-making, driven by the inclusion of women in leadership roles. For instance, the following impacts have been reported: improved financial performance, stronger organizational climates, stronger commitments to equity and diversity, increased organizational social responsibility and reputation, less corruption, and greater innovation capabilities due to the varied perspectives women and men bring to the table (Mechkova, Dahlum & Petrarca, 2024; Ottervik & Su, 2023; Kakabadse et al. 2015; Madsen, 2015; Hafsi & Turgut, 2013). The expected benefits are based on the assumption that women and men are inherently different and that women can diversify boards beyond pure gender in terms of skills, abilities, experiences, attitudes, values, behaviours, and networks (Kirsch, 2018; Kakabadse et al.2015; Hillman, Shropshire, & Cannella, 2007).

However, counter-intuitively, studies in different contexts have shown that men and women in board positions may actually be rather similar to each other, holding similar perspectives on board governance (Carvalho & Diogo, 2018; Mikkonen, Stenvall, & Lehtonen, 2021; Wille et al. 2018), and that the inclusion of women and descriptive representation does not automatically lead to the expected improvement (Mechkova, Dahlum, & Petrarca, 2024).

As stated in the Nigeria Federal Colleges of Education (Amended) Act, 2023, there shall be at least one woman in the Governing Council.

Council Tenure

Council tenure is the period of existence of any constituted council. In Nigeria, Section 2(3) of the Universities (Miscellaneous Provisions) (Amendment) Act, 2003, provides that "the Council so constituted shall have a tenure of four years from the date of its inauguration, provided that, where a Council is found to be incompetent and corrupt, it shall be dissolved by the Visitor and a new Council shall be immediately constituted for the effective functioning of the University". While the single fixed tenure of four years of the Council is not entirely new,

the express provision for the ground for dissolution of any Council and the provision for immediate constitution of a new Council to replace the dissolved one have important legal implications for the University system. This means that the Visitor cannot dissolve any Council without this requirement being first fulfilled. If he does, a legal suit may be filed at the instance of aggrieved Council members to challenge the dissolution (Federal Ministry of Education, 2023).

External members of the Governing Council would normally vacate their seats upon dissolution of the Council or by effluxion of time after the expiration of their four-year tenure. However, internal members of Council who are usually appointed by a body to represent it in Council (e.g. Senate, Congregation and Convocation), have their tenure regulated by the statute of the University concerned. This is normally a term of two years for such a representative subject to re-appointment for a second and final term of two years as stated in Section 2(3) of the Universities (Miscellaneous Provisions) (Amendment) Act, 2003.

The institution's representative in Council is usually selected through the process of election in the Senate, Congregation or Convocation. The date of the respective elections by the bodies they represent, is regarded as the official date of their election into Council. Accordingly, where they are yet to complete their tenure before the dissolution of the Council, they would automatically become members of the re-constituted Council, pending the completion of their tenure as prescribed in the University statute (Federal Ministry of Education, 2023).

Council Expertise

Council expertise is the knowledge possessed by members on university administration. Cossin and Caballero (2024) argue that for a board to be effective, the members should have diverse qualifications, experience, personality and opinion. In terms of qualifications, to qualify as a member of the Governing Council the person must be of proven integrity, knowledgeable and familiar with the affairs and tradition of a University (Cossin and Caballero, 2024). Apart from the moral qualification, the Universities (Miscellaneous Provisions) (Amendment) Act, 2003 does not expressly specify any educational qualification for membership of the Council. However, the necessary implication to be gleaned from the above is that, for a person to be knowledgeable and familiar with the affairs and traditions of the University, he must at least have gone through the University system. In other words, it can safely be implied from this provision that a member of the Governing Council should be at least a graduate from any recognized University.

Alan (2008) noted that council members often possess little expertise in higher education. The lack of expertise is especially profound in the higher education space where differences in race, ethnicity, gender, religion, sexual orientation, ability, age and so forth -- are salient to the everyday lives of those who live, learn and work on campuses. Board members can often go through their entire terms not setting foot on a campus apart from their episodic board meetings four to six times a year. They seldom interact with various stakeholders like students, staff and faculty.

Council Meetings

Meetings are central to working on a governing council. A council meeting is a formal meeting of members of council of a higher educational institution held at definite intervals and as needed to review performance, consider policy issues, address major problems and perform the legal business of the council. The meeting is where the core business happens. Board meetings are essential for driving effective governance, ensuring strategic alignment, and fostering organisational accountability. A well-structured board meeting can lead to productive

discussions and impactful decisions, from setting the agenda to documenting minutes (Fich & Shivdasani, 2005).

Lowry (2001) noted that one key document about council meetings is the agenda. When prepared correctly, the agenda will ensure council meetings stay focused and productive. In meetings, members will have a chance to talk about any issues on the agenda and also talk about the institution's strategic plans and budget. One of the most important things about council meetings is ensuring an accurate record of what was discussed. Usually, this is done with the council meeting minutes. Taking minutes is usually the responsibility of the secretary to council (registrar), whose work will provide council members with an understanding of the key boardroom issues and any actions taken (Lipton & Lorsch, 1999).

Smith (2024) opined that effective council meeting requires setting a date and time that suits enough members to form a quorum and communicating same to all members through a formal notice of meeting. Notice of meeting is expected to be circulated two weeks prior to meeting date. Boards must adhere to core board meeting procedures that follow governance rules set out in board bylaws which may be influenced by the institution regulations. If the Chairman of council is not present at a meeting of the Council such other member of the Council present at the meeting as the Council may appoint as respects that meeting shall be the chairman at that meeting. Typically, meetings are held at fixed intervals, and are essential for decision-making and compliance with legal and regulatory responsibilities.

The frequency of council meetings may differ from one institution to another. However, in Nigeria, the Universities (Miscellaneous Provisions) (Amendment) Act, 2003 provides that council meetings are to be held four times in an academic session.

Council Ethnic Diversity

Institutions must ensure everyone has an equal opportunity to be appointed to the governing body regardless of characteristics like ethnicity or disability status. Governing bodies with greater diversity may not only improve the running and effectiveness of the board (Buse et al 2016), but also promote more challenging discussions and shine a light on alternative perspectives and experiences. Governing councils that reflect the characteristics of an institution's staff and student bodies are better placed to represent the needs and concerns of those staff and students.

Overall, a greater diversity in governing councils will lead to more inclusive and better-informed decision-making. Equal representation of people from different backgrounds, and with different identities, has been a longstanding issue in higher education governing councils. Compared to other areas of employment, tenure on governing councils was typically a shorter-term responsibility, offering the opportunity to address diversity concerns relatively quickly. However, since people recruited to governing councils were often from senior leadership positions, they remain likely to have faced barriers to entry to these positions earlier on in their career. Other barriers might include the decision not to pay board members, restricting the applicant pool to people who were able to take on unpaid work (Alatas, Cameron, Chaudhuri, Erkal & Gangadharan, 2009).

Political Party Affiliation

Avnon (2007) posits that a political party is an organization that coordinates candidates to compete in a specific country's elections. It is common for the members of a party to hold similar ideas about politics, and parties may promote specific ideological or policy goals.

Political parties have become a major part of the politics of almost every country, as modern party organizations developed and spread around the world over the last few centuries. Some countries have only one political party, while others have several. It is extremely rare for a country to have no political parties. Parties are important in the politics of autocracies as well as democracies, though usually democracies have more political parties than autocracies. Autocracies often have a single party that governs the country, and some political scientists consider competition between two or more parties to be an essential part of democracy.

Alan (2008) opine that parties can develop from existing divisions in society, like the divisions between lower and upper classes, and they streamline the process of making political decisions by encouraging their members to cooperate. Political parties usually include a party leader, who has primary responsibility for the activities of the party; party executives, who may select the leader and who perform administrative and organizational tasks; and party members, who may volunteer to help the party, donate money to it, and vote for its candidates. There are many different ways in which political parties can be structured and interact with the electorate. The contributions that citizens give to political parties are often regulated by law, and parties will sometimes govern in a way that favours the people who donate time and money to them.

Parties are typically led by a party leader, who is the main representative of the party and often has primary responsibility for overseeing the party's policies and strategies. The leader of the party that controls the government usually becomes the head of government, such as the president or prime minister, and the leaders of other parties explicitly compete to become the head of government. In both presidential democracies and parliamentary democracies, the members of a party frequently have substantial input into the selection of party leaders, for example by voting on party leadership at a party conference. Because the leader of a major party is a powerful and visible person, many party leaders are well-known career politicians. Party leaders can be sufficiently prominent that they affect how voters perceive the entire political party, and some voters decide how to vote in elections partly based on how much they like the leaders of the different parties (Olanrewaju, 2017).

Political party affiliation is the identification of an individual with a particular political party in a country. It refers to membership of a political party. Alan (2008) asserts that affiliation with political parties may strongly affect attitudes and behaviour as it relates to university governing councils. They reported that researchers from Yale University conducted an experiment examining the effects of political party identification on political attitudes and opinions. Participants in the study who received a printed letter indicating that they must register with a political party to vote in an upcoming election were more likely to affiliate with a party, change their views on political issues, and change their voting behaviour. These results imply that group associations and political party affiliation influence individuals' behaviours and attitudes in the governing council.

University Performance

According to Martho (2024), performance is the level of success recorded by an organization. It is the ability to achieve a predetermined objective. In the context of a university, performance is the level of success recorded in teaching, research, and community service by the university. Times Higher Education (2024) used eighteen (18) performance indicators across five key areas of teaching (teaching reputation, staff-to-student ratio, doctorate-to-bachelor's ratio, doctorates-awarded-to-academic-staff ratio, and institutional income), research environment (research reputation, research income, and research productivity), research quality (citation impact, research strength, research excellence, and research influence), industry (industry

income, and patents) and international outlook (proportion of international students, proportion of international staff, and international collaboration) to assess universities' performance.

Teaching reputation measures the quality of teaching in the university and assessing how committed an institution is to nurturing the next generation of academics is a good teaching metric. Times Higher Education (2024) noted that a high proportion of postgraduate research students suggests the provision of teaching at the highest level, which is thus attractive to graduates and effective at developing them. This indicator takes into account a university's unique subject mix, reflecting that the volume of doctoral awards varies from discipline to discipline. Institutional income indicates an institution's general status and gives a broad sense of the infrastructure and facilities available to students and staff.

The university's reputation for research excellence among its peers and research income is crucial to the development of world-class research, and much of it is subject to competition and judged by peer review. Productivity measures a university's ability to get papers published in quality peer-reviewed journals (Park & Zhu, 2017).

Research citations help to show how much each university is contributing to the sum of human knowledge. They indicate whose research has stood out, has been picked up and built on by other scholars and, most importantly, has been shared around the global scholarly community to expand the boundaries of our understanding, irrespective of discipline. Research strength calculates the 75th percentile of field-weighted citation impact – a very robust guide to how strong typical research is. Research excellence looks at the number of research publications in the top 10 per cent for field-weighted citation impact worldwide – a guide to the amount of world-leading research at an institution. Research influence helps to understand when research is recognised in turn by the most influential research in the world – a broader look at excellence. The idea behind the metric is that the value of citations is not equal: a citation from an "important" paper is more significant than a citation from an "unimportant" one (Knott & Payne, 2001).

As noted by Knott and Payne (2001) a university's ability to help industry with innovations, inventions and consultancy has become a core mission of the contemporary global academy. The industry income metric seeks to capture such knowledge-transfer activity by looking at how much research income an institution earns from industry. The extent to which businesses are willing to pay for research and a university's ability to attract funding in the commercial marketplace are useful indicators of institutional quality. But the extent to which universities are supporting their national economies through technology transfer is an area that deserves greater recognition.

The ability of a university to attract undergraduates, postgraduates and faculty from all over the planet is key to its success on the world stage. Also, the proportion of a university's total relevant publications that have at least one international co-author is a performance indicator of universities (Times Higher Education, 2024).

Theoretical Framework

The baseline theory for this study is the system theory, which was developed by Von Bertalanffy in 1950. The theory states that an organization is a series of systems and subsystems that interact with one another to create the overall organizational system.

The relevance of this theory to this paper is that a tertiary educational institution can be seen as a system that has a goal to achieve with different sub-systems or parts that relate to one another and need one and another to realize the system general goal. In tertiary institution, a system refers to a cohesive collection of educational resources in form of human and materials resources. The human resources are the Statutory Organs of tertiary institutions (universities)

include Visitor (Head of State), the Governing Council, the Senate, the Deputy Vice-Chancellor, Faculties and College, Congregation and the Student Affairs. Various components of the system the Visitor, Governing Council, Senate, Congregation, Faculties and College, Departments, and the Student Affairs) interact with each other regularly and need each other to realize the University's objectives. The visitor must appoint the Governing Council before an effective administration can take place in the institutions. The Senate, Faculties and College, Congregation and the Student Affairs need quality policies from the governing council to help in carrying out their assignment.

Review of Empirical Literature

Mikkonen, Andrade, Pekkola, Antonowicz, Carvalho and Geshwind (2025) conducted a study on gender differences in the boards of higher education institutions (HEIs), challenging the notion of inherent differences between men and women in board governance. The article provides a gendered analysis of the perceptions of men and women board members about board governance in Finland, Poland, Portugal and Sweden. Contrary to expectations of diverse perceptions, a survey across these countries' higher education systems revealed that men and women on boards generally shared similar perspectives on board governance. Factors such as professional background, age, and country context proved more significant than gender. The study indicated nuanced differences between men and women board members, such as women exhibiting a more managerialist mindset and emphasizing sustainability. This research contributes to discussions about gender diversity in board governance, extending the exploration to the unique context of European HEIs. The findings provide insights of (gender) diversity and homogeneity of board members. For decision-makers and practitioners these insights provide a starting point to shape gender diversity policies for HEIs.

Doki, Idoko and Kaji (2024) ascertained the perceived influence of Governing Councils' roles on the administration of Federal Colleges of Education in North-Central, Nigeria. It was guided by three (3) specific objectives, and three (3) research questions were raised and answered. Three (3) hypotheses were formulated and tested at 0.05 level of significance. The study adopted a survey research design. The study area is North central, Nigeria. The population of the study comprised 10367 senior academic and non-academic staff from the four Federal Colleges of Education in North Central Nigeria. The sample size for this study is 384 and it was realized using Krejcie and Morgan Table for sample size determination. The instrument used for data collection was a structured questionnaire titled "Governing Council and Administration of Federal Colleges of Education Questionnaire" (GCAFCEQ). This instrument was duly validated by five experts and Cronbach alpha reliability estimation was used to obtain a reliability coefficient of 0.71. Data collected were analyzed using descriptive statistic of Mean and Standard Deviation and inferential statistic of Chi-square. The result of the findings revealed that Governing Councils have positive influence on the appointment of provosts, provision of infrastructural facilities and funding of Federal Colleges of Education in North-Central, Nigeria. The study concluded that Governing Councils plays prominent roles in the appointment of provosts, provision of infrastructural facilities and funding of Federal Colleges of Education in North-Central, Nigeria.

Ogunode and Sarkinfada (2023) examined the challenges militated against development of governing councils of tertiary institutions in Nigeria. Secondary data were employed in the paper. The secondary data were collected from print and online publications. The paper concluded that political instability, poor knowledge of tertiary institutions management, poor capacity building programme, strike actions and, lack of adequate research on governing council activities are challenges that militated against development of governing council of tertiary institutions in Nigeria.

Ofor and Ikediugwu (2023) conducted a study on the assessment of university council's performance in the South East. Seven research questions and hypotheses guided the study. The population of the study comprised 165 subjects made up of 115 internal members of governing councils and 50 persons whose duties relate to activities of governing councils. A 48-item researcher developed questionnaire titled "Assessment of university council Performance Questionnaire (AUCPQ)" was used for data collection. The instrument was validated by three experts while Cronbach's alpha coefficient method was used to determine the internal consistency of the items. The research questions were analysed using the mean value while the hypotheses were tested using z-test of two sample means. It was found among others that the extent of governing councils performance in their functions was high in personnel functions but low in financial functions, monitoring and review of programmes and awards, external relations, internal relationships and development and maintenance of facilities and infrastructure in federal and state universities. The extent governing councils perform the functions of maintenance of university culture was high in federal universities but low in state universities.

Ogunode and Sarkinfada (2023) examined the challenges facing appointment and selection of leaders in university system in Nigeria. Secondary data were employed. Secondary data were gathered from print materials and online publications. The paper specifically stated that political influence and interest, indigenization of principal officer problems, non-cooperation from departments, opposition from trade unions and favoritism and corruption are the challenges facing appointment and selection of leaders in university system in Nigeria.

Akura and Okwori (2022) investigated governing councils' practical approach on management of federal universities in North Central Nigeria. Two research questions guided the study. The study formulated and tested two null hypotheses. The descriptive survey design was adopted for the study. The population of the study was 1,451 which comprised 108 governing council, 1078 Senate, 70 Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU), 65 Senior Staff Association of Nigeria Universities (SSANU), 60 Non-Academic Staff Union (NASU) and 70 Students Union Government (SUG), from the 7 federal universities in the North Central Nigeria. The sample was 364 governing council members. The instrument used for data collection was a four- point rating scale questionnaire titled "Governing Councils Approach and Management of Federal Universities Questionnaire (GCAMFUQ)". The instrument was validated by three experts to determine the validity of the instrument while Cronbach Alpha statistics was used to determine the reliability of the instrument. The result of the reliability test yielded a reliability coefficient of 0.84. The research questions were answered using mean scores and standard deviations with a mean score cut-off point of 2.50. Chi-square was used to test the hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance. The findings of the study indicated that governing councils have significant influence on financial management and maintenance of ICT facilities in federal universities in North Central Nigeria.

Using The Public Higher Education Boards Database designed by Association of Governing Boards of Universities and Colleges (AGB) in 2008, Park and Zhu (2017) reviewed prior studies of governing boards and investigated regional differences in boards' characteristics including board type, selection method, board composition, provision condition, term length, supervision and meeting frequency. The results show that: (1) highly centralized state university governance with more political control exist in West and Middle West; (2) governing boards in Northeast are more autonomous with high percentage of alumni and self-perpetuating members, and less political affiliations; (3) more faculty participation appear in South and West and most Middle West boards do not have removal process and longer length of term.

Tsav (2015) conducted a study on governing councils" activities on staff and students personnel management in federal and state universities in the north central states, Nigeria. The study adopted a descriptive survey design. The population of the study was 1827 made up of governing council members, senate members, ASUU executive members, SSANU executive members, NASU executive members, and SUG executive members. A sample of 374 was drawn for the study and a ten item structured questionnaire and interview schedule were used to collect data for the study. Data collected were presented using descriptive statistics while t-test was used to test the null hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance. The study found out that there was no significant difference in the mean rating of senate members and staff union executive of federal and state universities on the extent the governing council activities influenced staff personnel administration while the council and senate members in federal and state universities significantly differed in their mean responses on the extent that the governing council activities affected the student personnel administration.

Adetunji and Mojeed-Sanni (2015) investigated the role and position of governing council in the development of Nigeria university education. The paper uses a standard literature review to study university composition as it relates to the governing council. Deep attention is given to the development and composition of privately owned institution eclectically, those that have been graduating student in the last 7years. 7 universities were selected for the study, 5 major stakeholders who have direct involvement in the activities of university management were selected in each university (that is vice-chancellor, registrar and university lawyer). Qualitative approach that adopts a semi structure interview was assumed suitable for the study. The study outcome reveals that university management efforts are sometimes affected by the decision of the governing council. The study reveals that university management development plan are influenced both positively and negatively by the governing council while university management finds it difficult to implement decisions they believe it will promote good practices, governing councils are sometimes in different to university management decision.

Lokuwaduge and Armstrong (2014) present an analysis of the impact of the governance structures on performance in government-funded universities since the Australian National Governance Protocols were introduced in 2004. The methodology involved analysing the relationships between indices of governance structures namely board size, board independence and board committees, and financial, research and teaching performances. Results showed that the board size did not relate to financial, research or teaching performance in any way. In terms of board independence, the more independent the boards, the less impact they had on both research and teaching performances. Financial performances were not impacted. This finding may suggest that boards dominated by internal members rather than independent ones could have a better influence on teaching and research performance. While stronger board committees positively impacted financial and research performances, this was not the case for teaching performance. Board committees showed a negative relationship with teaching performance, suggesting that excessive monitoring may negatively influence teaching quality.

Williams (2011) conducted a study on assessing the impact of governing boards for Louisiana Public Institutions of higher learning regarding policy and governance in Louisiana, United States. The research was conducted utilizing the grounded theory approach of qualitative research. Five research questions were formulated for the study. The researcher used a research technique called axial coding to interpret the collected data. Axial coding is utilized when the categories and themes that have emerged from the interviews are compared, cross-referenced, and analyzed across data. All chains of Louisiana public higher education governing boards and one member were interviewed. The findings of the study were that Louisiana governing boards have made significant impacts on their respective systems regarding policy and governance.

Kezar (2006) conducted a study on rethinking public higher education governing board performance in the United States. The study conducted elite interviews with 132 different experts on board performance. The snowball sampling technique was used as those interviewed provided additional names of people whom they knew were particularly insightful and had significant expertise with higher education boards. Two research questions were formulated for the study. The study found among others that, there is a set of unique elements necessary to facilitate high performance among public higher education boards. One of the factors that appear to differentiate public from private board performance is the political nature of public boards.

Methodology

The population of this study consists of the sixty-three (63) federal universities in Nigeria. For lack of available data, thirty-seven (37) federal universities were considered for the study. The data for the various dimensions of the independent variable (governing council structure) were obtained through a questionnaire administered on the council officer of the respective universities while data on university's performance with eighteen (18) performance indicators were sourced from Times Higher Education, World University Ranking (2024). The data were based on the ranking of all universities (Federal, State, and Private) in Nigeria.

The variables of the study were measured as presented in Table 1 below:

Table 1: Measurement of Variables

S/N	Variables	Measurements	Authorities
1.	University's Performance	University ranking based on teaching, research environment, research quality, industry, and international outlook.	Times Higher Education (2024)
2.	Council Size	The total number of members in Council.	Federal Ministry of Education (2023)
3.	Council Gender Diversity	The number of women in Council.	Federal Ministry of Education (2023)
4.	Council Tenure	The number of years a Council is met to serve.	Federal Ministry of Education (2023)
5.	Council Expertise	The number of Council members with experience in university's administration.	Federal Ministry of Education (2023)
6.	Council Meetings	The frequency of meetings held by members of Council in an academic session.	Federal Ministry of Education (2023)
7.	Council Ethnic Diversity	The number of members of different ethnicity in Council.	Federal Ministry of Education (2023)
8.	Political Party Affiliation	Dummy variable which is considered 1 if the external members of Council affiliate with a political party and 0, if otherwise.	Akenbor (2023)

The data generated for this study were analysed descriptively using simple mean and standard deviation while the stated hypotheses were tested with the Ordinary Least Square (OLS) multiple regression analysis.

The model specification for this study is given in functional form as:

PER = f (CSIZE, CEXP, CMET, CTEN, CGD, CED, PPA) -- (i)

In econometric form, the model becomes:

$$PER = [\alpha_0 + \beta_1 CSIZE_i + \beta_2 CEXP_i + \beta_3 CMET_i + \beta_4 CTEN_i + \beta_5 CGD_i + \beta_6 CED_i + \beta_7 PPA_i + (\beta_8 CGS \times PPA_i) +- -\mu]$$ -- (ii)

Where:

CSIZE = Council Size

CEXP = Council Expertise

CMET = Council Meetings

CTEN = Council Meetings

CGD = Council Gender Diversity

CED = Council Ethnicity Diversity

PPA = Political Party Affiliation

GCS = Governing Council Structure

α = Regression constant

$\beta_1 - \beta_{12}$ = Regression Co-efficient

Descriptive Analysis

The data were descriptively analysed using mean and standard deviation as presented in Table 2 below:

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics

	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
PER	35.1351	28.62125	37
CSIZE	15.0270	.86559	37
CEXP	6.3784	.68115	37
CMET	3.8378	.37368	37
CTEN	4.0000	.00000	37
CGED	3.9730	.92756	37
CED	7.2973	2.02574	37
PPA	1.0000	.00000	37

Table 2 above revealed that the mean performance of Federal Universities in Nigeria is 35 from a total of 272 universities with a standard deviation of 28.62 which is lower than the mean. This implies that the mean is a good representation of the series. Council size revealed a mean of 15 members with a standard deviation of 0.87; the mean value of council members with expertise in university governance is about 6 members and standard deviation of 0. 68; council meeting revealed a mean of about 4 times a year and a standard deviation of 0.37; the mean value of tenure of council members is 4 years and a standard deviation of 0; the mean value of council gender diversity is about 4 members and a standard deviation of 0.92; council ethnic diversity shows a mean value of 7 members and a standard deviation of 2; and the mean value of political party affiliation is 1 with a standard deviation of 0. Since the standard deviations of all the variables are lower than the mean, it implies that the mean values are good representations of the series of data used.

Test of Hypotheses

Ho$_1$:   Governing council structure has no significant relationship with the performance of federal universities in Nigeria.

In testing hypothesis 1, a multiple regression of the various dimensions of Governing Council Structure and performance of Federal Universities was conducted, and the results obtained are presented in Tables 3 and 4 below:

Table 3: Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Durbin-Watson
1	.673	.453	.364	22.82183	1.393

Table 4: ANOVA

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	13344.406	5	2668.881	5.124	.002
	Residual	16145.918	31	520.836		
	Total	29490.324	36			

Table 3 shows a correlation coefficient of 0.673 with a p- value of 0.002 as shown in Table 3. Since the p value is less than 0.05 level of significance, it implies that there is a significant relationship between Governing Council Structure and Performance of Federal Universities in Nigeria.

Ho$_2$: Council size has no significant relationship with the performance of federal universities in Nigeria.

In testing hypothesis 2, data on council size were regressed with performance of Federal Universities, and the results obtained are presented in Table 5. It was observed that council size has a correlation coefficient of -0.317 and a p- value of 0.124, which is greater than 0. 05 level of significance. This implies that council size has a negative but non-significant relationship with performance of Federal Universities in Nigeria.

Ho$_3$: Council expertise has no significant relationship with the performance of federal universities in Nigeria.

In testing hypothesis 3, data on council expertise were regressed with performance of Federal Universities, and the results obtained are presented in Table 5. It was observed that council expertise has a correlation coefficient of -0.370 and a p value of 0.047, which is less than 0.05 level of significance. This implies that council expertise has a negative significant relationship with performance of Federal Universities in Nigeria.

Ho$_4$: Council meeting has no significant relationship with the performance of federal universities in Nigeria.

In testing hypothesis 4, data on council meetings were regressed with performance of Federal Universities, and the results obtained are presented in Table 5. It was observed that council meeting has a correlation coefficient of -0.088 and a p value of 0.590, which is greater than 0.05 level of significance. This implies that council meeting has a negative but non significant relationship with performance of Federal Universities in Nigeria.

Ho$_5$: Council tenure has no significant relationship with the performance of federal universities   in Nigeria.

In testing hypothesis 5, data on council tenure were regressed with performance of Federal Universities, and the results obtained are presented in Table 5. It was observed that council tenure has a correlation coefficient of 0.099 and a p value of 0.560, which is greater than 0.05 level of significance. This implies that council tenure has a positive significant relationship with performance of Federal Universities in Nigeria.

Ho$_6$: Council gender diversity has no significant relationship with the performance of federal universities in Nigeria.

In testing hypothesis 6, data on council gender diversity were regressed with performance of Federal Universities, and the results obtained are presented in Table 5. It was observed that council gender diversity has a correlation coefficient of 0. 006 and a p value of 0.970, which is greater than 0.05 level of significance. This implies that council gender diversity has a positive significant relationship with performance of Federal Universities in Nigeria.

Ho7:   Council ethnic diversity has no significant relationship with the performance of federal universities in Nigeria.

In testing hypothesis 7, data on council ethnic diversity were regressed with performance of Federal Universities, and the results obtained are presented in Table 5. It was observed that council State diversity has a correlation coefficient of -0. 002 and a p value of 0.990, which is greater than 0.05 level of significance. This implies that council ethnic diversity has a negative but non-significant relationship with performance of Federal Universities in Nigeria.

Table 5: Coefficients

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	T	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	317.222	69.946		4.535	.000
	CSIZE	-10.483	6.623	-.317	-1.583	.124
	CEXP	-15.542	7.518	-.370	-2.067	.047
	CMET	-6.767	12.422	-.088	-.545	.590
	CTEN	2.817	4.793	.099	.588	.560
	CGED	.184	4.892	.006	.038	.970
	CED	-.025	2.072	-.002	-.012	.990

Ho8:   Political party affiliation has no significant effect in moderating the relationship between governing council structure and performance of federal universities in Nigeria.

In testing hypothesis 8, data on council governance structure (CSIZE, CEXP, CMET, CTEN, CGED, CED) and political party affiliation (PPA) were regressed with performance (PER) of Federal Universities, and the results obtained are presented in Tables 6 and

Table 6: Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.619	.383	. 541	29.11093

Table 7: ANOVA[b]

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	14219.109	5	31722.111	4.283	.007
	Residual	17004.011	31	680.013		
	Total	31223.120	36			

Tables 6 and 7 above show a correlation coefficient of 0.619 and p-value of 0.007, which is less than 0.05 level of significance. This implies that political party affiliation (PPA) significantly moderate the relationship between governing council structure and performance of Federal Universities in Nigeria.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Universities' Governing Councils are bodies set up by the university's owner(s) to monitor and control the resources (financial, materials, and human) of the university that have been

entrusted in the hands of management. It ensures that management make judicious use of the resources; and are accountable to the owner(s) of the university. Several claims have been made that the structure of a university governing council affects the university's performance. In view of the above, this study investigated the relationship between university governing council structure and performance of Federal universities in Nigeria moderated by political party affiliation.

The findings of the study revealed that council size and council meetings have a negative and non-significant relationship with performance of Federal Universities in Nigeria. This implies that as council membership and the frequency of meetings increase, the performance of federal university falls. Furthermore, the more members of council with expertise knowledge increases, the less is the performance of federal universities in Nigeria.

Similarly, increase in the tenure of council members, and a gender sensitive council bring about increase in federal universities performance in Nigeria. But a council with ethnic diversity has a negative relationship with performance of Federal Universities in Nigeria. Furthermore, it was observed that political party affiliations significantly moderate the relationship between governing council structure and performance of federal universities in Nigeria. Finally, integration of the various dimensions of governing council structure suggests a positive and significant relationship between governing council structure and performance of federal universities in Nigeria.

Considering the findings of this study, and the conclusion drawn there from, the following recommendations are made:

The large size of governing councils in federal universities in Nigeria should be discouraged since it hinders improved performance of the university. The external members of council together with the Vice Chancellor and the Deputy Vice Chancellors are enough to constitute the university's governing council.

Frequency of meeting by members of governing councils of federal universities in Nigeria should be reduced as such also hinders the performance of the university. Meetings in the first and last quarters of the year are enough since governing council only exercise oversight function.

Membership of the governing council of federal universities with expertise knowledge in university management is not necessary as such bring about delay in decision making.

The tenure of governing council members of federal universities should be increased to six years to enable them to outstay the Vice Chancellor whose tenure is five years. With this the council shall be able to properly guide and oversee the activities of the incoming Vice Chancellor.

The proportion of women to men in the governing council of federal universities in Nigeria should be increased to about 40% since such diversity enhances the performance of the university.

Membership of the governing council of federal universities in Nigeria should be drawn from the ethnicity where the university is located. This is because they will be more committed to ensuring the development of the university.

Political party affiliation should play a key role in the appointment of external members to the governing councils.

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